Bonus: Student's Perspective on VR

00:08–00:27

Andrew Coletti: Hello. Welcome to this bonus episode of The T in Teaching. Last episode we interviewed two professors from the Fox School of Business about their experience in teaching a financial course in virtual reality and discussing the application of virtual reality in online education. In this episode, we wanted to get an idea of a student's perspective on learning in a virtual space.

00:27–00:53

Andrew Coletti: So today we're talking to Ashley Carespodi, a graduate student of the Fox School of Business. This interview was conducted by videographers from the Online and Digital Learning Department, Gabby Gutierrez, and Thomas Lennon. To recap, students were mailed a VR headset named an Oculus Quest and would then log into an application called Chimera. Students will then spawn into a room and see other participants where they discuss specific topics in the financial world.

00:53–01:20

Andrew Coletti: The layout was to simulate a Harvard case study room where the professor would facilitate questions and topics. The structure of the class would be in Zoom for the first half of class discussion and then switch over to VR for the second half. In total, the class would last about 115 minutes. Thank you for listening and please enjoy. Take it away Gabby.

01:22–01:33

Gabby Gutierrez: So, Ashley, what was it like switching between Zoom and VR? Like the overall experience of being in a virtual classroom outside of the normal Zoom format?

01:34–01:51

Ashley Carespodi: I don't think the structure was bad. Switching back and forth, I think maybe have lost a couple of minutes in the transition, but it wasn't bad. And then I know some people had technical difficulties, which I think we've probably lost some time there, but overall, it wasn't too disruptive.

01:52–02:18

Gabby Gutierrez: Yeah, that's good. Yeah. With new technologies, there can be limitations. Where how long do you actually stay in the headset before user fatigue? Like we know Zoom fatigue exists where especially in education, students tend to lose their attention after a certain point of the lecture. So, kind of managing that. So, I understand that's like the 30 minutes of VR before the way of the headset gets to you. Yeah.

02:19–02:25

Ashley Carespodi: It was a little difficult to get used to at first, but not to take too long.

02:25–02:31

Gabby Gutierrez: That's good. Yeah. Since this was your first time, what was the training like as a student?

02:32–02:59

Ashley Carespodi: Yeah, the training inside. It was pretty easy to navigate. To your point, though, I think being able to utilize it further, maybe whether it be within taking quizzes or to view other content to get a better idea versus just watching videos on YouTube or reading articles. I think if there was a way to kind of encompass more learnings outside of just the classroom 30 minute session, that would be great as well.

02:59–03:07

Gabby Gutierrez: Yeah. Where are you familiar using a VR headset before the class? Like, like, did you have some expectation of what the class was going to be?

03:08–03:32

Ashley Carespodi: I didn't really have any. I had Dr. G in the past and really enjoyed his communication and open discussion forums and just the way that he taught that I wanted to take the course, had no expectations, never used a VR set before, so didn't really know what I was getting myself into, but was very interested because where else do you really get this opportunity to do so?

03:33–03:33

Gabby Gutierrez: Definitely.

03:34–03:45

Thomas Lennon: Yeah, I mean, it sounds like it was you had this time getting into it. Did you have any other issues with the user experience, the interface you were working with, both getting into VR and once you were in VR?

03:45–03:56

Ashley Carespodi: Not at all. I think the only thing that we touched on this is being unable to log in when you're elsewhere and don't have the set with you.

03:58–04:21

Thomas Lennon: We have we've made for this. The VR course is a web version of a viewer, a browser window that you can use to join the class, which we've never distributed to the class because the point is to be the immersive thing. But had you known that was available, would you have joined from a remote location without the goggles?

04:21–04:41

Ashley Carespodi: Sure. I think that's a really good point because I know I had missed one of the VR portions because of that. I know one of my one of my friends had this one because she moved, and she had everything packed up. So, I think that would be great, especially given, you know, life post-COVID or how ever you want to phrase it.

04:42–05:01

Ashley Carespodi: Everyone is so busy with work and traveling and getting stuck places essentially because of travel being a nightmare that I think it's definitely a nice opportunity to still not miss that portion of class and being able to get on even as even if you can get on from Zoom and still listen, but not be able to see the background.

05:01–05:07

Ashley Carespodi: I think that would be fantastic because your point, you know, I missed that whole portion of that 30 minutes of the class.

05:07–05:26

Thomas Lennon: Right. Right. And this is where we should actually keep this in mind for next time. Again, we want it was more of a backup and, but technology fails. Sometimes you lose your connections or whatever. So, we should maybe in the future make sure all the students have access to that as well. So, you got left out of the class.

05:27–05:52

Ashley Carespodi: Yeah. And I think even if you forget to charge it, it's a good option to have a backup as well. Maybe, you know, as long as it's communicating with the professor, I don't think there should be any points

docked. But maybe it's something that you could only, you know, an option to do once versus, you know, every week. Itâ€™s kind of takes away from the experience anyways.

05:52–06:06
Gabby Gutierrez: How did your experience in VR change the way you think or feel about online education, especially? What benefits were there of being a VR portion? What do you see coming from that?

06:06–06:36
Ashley Carespodi: Yeah, I think I think two points. The class was smaller, much smaller. So, I think that gave a really great opportunity to get more opinions and have a more in-depth conversation versus kind of bouncing all over to ensure that everyone gets time to say what they have to say. And then I also think that being in the VR world, having the discussions, I think it was a little bit more engaging.

06:36–06:58
Ashley Carespodi: I think being able to have that classroom setting and actually feel like you're in a classroom versus, like I said, looking at just people on a screen. Plus, you can't look at your computer. I mean, you're looking into a headset, so you're not really distracted by your cell phone or what's happening out your window and things like that.

06:59–07:05
Gabby Gutierrez: In your opinion, though, does the future of online learning involve VR?

07:06–07:28
Ashley Carespodi: I think it gave us and I mean, it gave me an idea of what we were discussing doing. And then you can kind of look ahead to see what was next and prepare yourself for questions. So, I think that was definitely, you know, I helped focus, but I think that the time that we had spent in there was so limited that there's definitely more opportunity to kind of build on it.

07:28–07:29
Gabby Gutierrez: Yeah, yeah.

07:30–08:05
Ashley Carespodi: But looking at a different ways to utilize the tool just outside of the 30 minutes within the discussion platform would be helpful being able to see know if it's a, if it's a global class based around global business, being able to see those environments and how the ways of working are and maybe even understand some of the struggles and disruptions that are dealt with because you're in a safe space, but you can see things that maybe are not as safe.

08:06–08:30
Ashley Carespodi: So, I think to that capacity, I think it would be really nice to do if there was, you know, an emerging course or I know there's like Fox Without Borders, things like that. I think it would be really nice to utilize a tool because you'll get a better understanding of what the atmosphere looks like, what gestures may be, you know, everything from handshakes to what to say, what not to say, what to expect, what to see.

08:31–08:32
Ashley Carespodi: I think that could definitely be helpful.

08:32–08:39
Thomas Lennon: The experiential, the being able to go someplace else through the magic of technology and see some things, right?

08:40–08:40
Ashley Carespodi: Definitely.

08:41–08:59

Thomas Lennon: Well, a follow up to that. Would you be interested or more interested in synchronous VR sessions like you had with the class, the lecture or asynchronous content where you might go and explore an environment by yourself or as a solo kind of experience?

09:00–09:26

Ashley Carespodi: I think all of the above. I don't think. I mean, I guess doing it solo might be less disruptive because you're not looking around much to see what everyone else is doing. But then I also think it's I don't want to say entertaining, but I think it is a little entertaining to see what everyone else is doing as well and to see what the reactions are and how the whole tool kind of works with other avatars as well.

09:27–09:49

Gabby Gutierrez: Right. Yeah. So going back to all education, everything compared to traditional styles of lecturing in a classroom. Would this set up be a benefit or kind of a distraction in in like a class, another class if you were to take another VR class?

09:50–10:13

Ashley Carespodi: No, I don't think so. I think I think Dr. G does a really good job on engaging people. And I think with a smaller classroom, it was able, like I said, to have a more thorough conversation. I don't think necessary really, that VR should be utilized for lectures. I think it's much more beneficial to have robust conversations and opinions.

10:15–10:21

Gabby Gutierrez: Did you ever see VR being used like in your current job or previous jobs before?

10:21–10:54

Ashley Carespodi: Yeah, I worked for Fever-Tree and I wasn't sure if you wanted me to mention that or not. But two points that just made me think of your question. I worked for Brown-Forman in the past, which is the supplier company that owns Jack Daniel's. So, we had brand ambassadors that had VR kits that when we would have events, bartenders or trade or consumers were able to sit down and we could put on the headset and they could see, you know, the fresh water and the barrel room and what the processes and the corn.

10:54–11:22

Ashley Carespodi: And I think we also had some kind of tools that you could kind of spray sense. So when you're going to the down room, you could smell the aging whiskey and you can smell the core and and smell the, you know, the final product and things like that and kind of hear everything as well. So, I think that really allows and really allows the customer or the trade or the bartender to get behind it because they have a better understanding versus just looking at pictures online.

11:23–11:59

Ashley Carespodi: And then to that extent, in my current role, we utilize different ingredients and resources from around the world. So I think being able to visualize and kind of almost look like you're holding a Japanese yuzu or, you know, different types of ginger or fresh Florida grapefruits and getting an understanding of where these products and resources ingredients are coming from and kind of seeing the forests and, you know, seeing the vines and so on.

11:59–12:01

Ashley Carespodi: And so forth. I think it could just go a long way.

12:02–12:09

Gabby Gutierrez: Yeah. Thank you, Ashley, thank you for taking the time to hop onto a Zoom call with us to talk more about your experience in this class.

12:09–12:12

Ashley Carespodi: Thank you is great meeting about if you need anything else to look out.

12:12–12:38

Gabby Gutierrez: Yeah, we really try in this podcast to hear about different perspective of education, especially online education here in this podcast. And for anyone that would want to discuss more about VR in our podcast or even online education, please feel free to reach out to the Online and Digital Learning Department here at the Fox School of Business. Thank you.